

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4343

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NICOSIA 2673

NODIS

FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH AMIN GEMAYEL

REF: STATE 215513

1. SUMMARY: AMIN GEMAYEL, DINING ALONG WITH US ON SEPT 1, TOOK THE OCCASION TO LAY OUT HIS GENERALLY PESSIMISTIC VIEWS ABOUT THE COURSE OF THE CONFLICT AND THE PROSPECTS FOR A SOLUTION. ON SEPTEMBER 4 WE VISITED AMIN AT HIS OFFICE TO REVIEW CAREFULLY OUR TALKING POINTS. AS HIS FATHER'S RIGHT HAND MAN, AMIN PROBABLY REFLECTS THE OUTLOOK OF THE PHALANGIST HIGH COMMAND.

2. AMIN HAD MET WITH SARKIS ON SEPTEMBER 1 TO LEARN THE OUTCOME OF THE LATTER'S MEETINGS WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD. AMIN SAID THAT THE SYRIANS WERE NOT PUTTING THEIR CARDS ON THE TABLE, ALTHOUGH THEY SUPPORTED SARKIS. AMIN DESCRIBED SARKIS AS "A VERY NICE MAN" WITH WHOM HE HAD A WARM PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP. HE MAINTAINED THAT THE PHALANGE WOULD DO WHAT IT COULD TO FACILITATE HIS WNMOROUS TASK. FOR OPENERS, THE PHALANGE HAS OFFERED TO SECURE THE AREA AROUND THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AT BAABDA AND A CORRIDOR TO BEIRUT AIRPORT. AMIN DID SEEM TO DOUBT WHETHER SARKIS WAS TOUGH ENOUGH FOR THE COMING TESTS. AMIN REFLECTED NONE OF THE OPTIMISM ABOUT SYRIA'S COMMIT-

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MENT THAT WE HAD HEARD FROM FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN ON OUR

LAST VISIT. ON THE CONTRARY, THE TENOR OF THE SARKIS/ASAD MEETING SEEMED TO STRENGTHEN IN AMIN'S MIND THE SUSPICION WHICH HE AND HIS FATHER HAD PREVIOUSLY EVINCED REGARDING SYRIA'S WILLINGNESS TO FULLY SUPPORT THE MARONITES' MILITARY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES. IN THIS RESPECT, OUR TALKING POINTS' REFERENCE TO A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN THE PRESENT FAVORABLE BALANCE OF ARAB ELEMENTS FELL ON FERTILE GROUND.

3. STRESSING THAT HIS VIEWS WERE TO BE HELD IN STRICT CONFIDENCE, AMIN SAID, "WE ARE VERY TIRED AND BADLY NEED A SETTLEMENT." I ASKED HIM IF IT WAS NOT TRUE THAT THE OTHER SIDE WAS ALSO TIRED OF FIGHTING. AMIN REPLIED THAT THIS WOULD BE TRUE EXCEPT FOR THE STREAM OF REINFORCEMENTS THEY RECEIVE -- MONEY, SUPPLIES AND, MOST IMPORTANT, FRESH TROOPS. HE CLAIMED THE IRAQI FORCES NOW NUMBERED 2,000 AND THAT SOMALIS AND ERITREANS HAD RECENTLY BEEN DISCOVERED FIGHTING WITH THE PALESTINIANS AS SHOCK TROOPS. HE ESTIMATED THE OTHER SIDE'S FORCES AS IN THE 30 TO 40,000 RANGE BUT DID NOT GIVE A FIGURE FOR CHRISTIAN FORCES. CHRISTIAN FORCES HAD BEEN ABLE TO COUNTER THE NUMERICAL SUPERIORITY OF THEIR OPPONENTS BY THEIR BETTER TRAINING, SUPERIOR EDUCATION AND BY THEIR WILL TO SURVIVE.

4. AMIN DISMISSED SAEB SALAM AS A PERSON OF NO IMPORTANCE NOW, EXCEPT AS HE IS ABLE TO BRING THE PALESTINIANS INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MARONITES. AMIN MAINTAINED THAT MOST LEBANESE MUSLIMS AND DRUZE ARE COMPLETELY TERRORIZED BY THE PALESTINIANS. WHILE NOT ACTIVELY FIGHTING TO ANY SIGNIFICANT DEGREE, LEBANESE MUSLIMS ARE NOT ABOUT TO SHAKE OFF PALESTINIAN DOMINATION. HOWEVER, MUCH THEY MAY CHAFE AT THE WAY IN WHICH THE PALESTINIANS ARE RUNNING AFFAIRS IN THAT PART OF LEBANON, FEAR OF TERRORISTIC REPRISALS KEEPS THE MUSLIMS IN THEIR PLACE.

5. DURING OUR SECOND MEETING I REVIEWED OUR TALKING POINTS WITH AMIN, EXPLAINING THAT THEY WERE THE SAME ONES WE HAD USED WITH HIS FATHER, FRANGIEH, AND SARKIS. AT AMIN'S REQUEST, I THEN REITERATED MY PRESENTATION WHILE
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HE STOPPED ME FROM TIME TO TIME TO ELUCIDATE KEY PASSAGES. AMIN APPEARED TO ACCEPT OUR GOOD INTENTIONS, ALTHOUGH HE ADMITTED HE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR CLEARER RESULTS. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION ABOUT A DESIRABLE OUTCOME TO THE CONFLICT, AMIN ADVANCED THE IDEA OF CANTONALIZATION, AT LEAST AS A TRANSITIONAL STAGE. (GHASSAN TWEINI AND DORY CHAMOUN MENTIONED THE SAME POSSIBILITY.) IT IS TOO MUCH TO ASK, HE SAID, THAT LEBANESE CHRISTIANS

ACCEPT THE STATIONING IN THEIR VILLAGES OF SECURITY FORCES WHICH WOULD INCLUDE PERSONNEL OF OPPOSING RELIGIOUS GROUPS. UNTIL THE PASSIONS OF THE PRESENT CONFLICT HAD DIED DOWN, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS TO CONTROL THEIR OWN SECURITY FORCES DRAWN FROM LOCAL INHABITANTS. HE EXPLAINED THAT THERE WOULD BE A CENTRAL ARMY, POSTAL SERVICES, ETC. WITH THE PRESIDENT RESIDENT IN BAABDA, BUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE DECENTRALIZED IN THE PROVINCES FOR CONFESSIONAL REASONS. I NOTED THAT THIS RAISED THE DANGER OF AREAS OF LEBANON BEING DOMINATED BY LEFTISTS AND PERPETUATED DE FACTO PARTITION, PROSPECTS WHICH AMIN REGARDED AS A NECESSARY EVIL.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4344

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 NICOSIA 2673

NODIS

FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

6. I CONGRATULATED AMIN ON THE ABILITY OF THE PHALANGE TO MAINTAIN POLITICAL CONTACTS WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND THE MUSLIMS. HE SAID THAT THE PHALANGE INTENDED TO KEEP TALKING WHILE FIGHTING BUT DID NOT ATTACH UNDUE HOPE TO THE TALKS. HE DOUBTED THAT THE PALESTINIANS SINCERELY DESIRED A SETTLEMENT AT THIS TIME, ALTHOUGH HE NOTED THAT BATTLE FATIGUE MIGHT PLAY A PART IN BRINGING THEM TO THE TABLE. RE THE SOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IN LEBANON, HE NOTED THAT "THE CAIRO ACCORDS ARE DEAD" IN THE SENSE THAT GREAT NUMBERS OF PALESTINIANS HAD ENTERED LEBANON SINCE SEPTEMBER 1970 BEARING HAAVY ARMS AND WOULD HAVE TO LEAVE. COMMENT: I DO NOT SEE THIS AS INDICATING A DIFFERENT POSITION FROM THE NATIONAL FRONT'S INSISTENCE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS. OUR OTHER INTER-

LOCUTORS HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT THE MARONITES WOULD INSIST ON AMENDMENTS TO THE CAIRO ACCORDS TO IN SOME WAY REDUCE OVERALL NUMBERS OF PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON. WE IN TURN SUGGESTED THAT THEY NOT RAISE THEIR HOPES IMPRACTICALLY HIGH AND STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF EVEN A TRANSITIONAL SETTLEMENT TO GIVE LEBANON A CHANCE TO GET BACK ON ITS FEET.

7. AMIN ALSO STATED HIS SATISFACTION WITH OUR PREFERENCE TO REOPEN THE ROADS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST BEIRUT SO THAT OUR DIPLOMATS COULD CIRCULATE IN BOTH PARTS OF THE COUNTRY RATHER THAN ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE
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IN JOUNIEH. HE NOTED THAT OUR POLICY AND THAT OF THE PHALANGE WAS SIMILAR IN MANY RESPECTS -- SUPPORT OF THE UNITY OF LEBANON, SUPPORT FOR SARKIS -- AND OFFERED TO BE OF ANY HELP TO US THAT WOULD IN TURN ENABLE US TO RENDER MORE AID TO LEBANON. HE ALSO EXPRESSED WITH SOME FERVOR THE HOPE THAT WE COULD HELP SYRIA AND THEREBY ENABLE SYRIA TO PLAY AN EVEN MORE HELPFUL ROLE IN LEBANON.

8. IN CLOSING I ASKED ABOUT RUMORS THAT FRANGIEH INTENDED TO DISMISS KARAME BEFORE SEPTEMBER 23. REFERRING TO FRANGIEH IN ANYTHING BUT COMPLEMENTARY TERMS, AMIN EXPLAINED THAT FRANGIEH HAD BEEN TRYING FOR A MONTH TO DISMISS KARAME AND HAD BEEN PREVENTED FROM DOING SO ONLY BY THE PHALANGE'S STAUNCH OPPOSITION. AMIN SAID HE HAD SO INFORMED KARAME.

9. COMMENT:

I HAVE KNOWN AMIN FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS AND ALWAYS THOUGHT OF HIM AS THE SPOILED SON OF A FAMOUS FATHER AND AS NOT BEING PARTICULARLY SERIOUS. HE HAS GROWN A GREAT DEAL WITH THE TROUBLES. BOTH DAVID AND I WERE IMPRESSED WITH HIS DIGNITY, HUMILITY, DEDICATION AND SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.
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